

*The Faith and the Service of a
Christian Minister.*

A Sermon,

PREACHED AT THE INSTITUTION OF

THE REV. J. EVERIST CATHELL,

Into the Rectorship of the Church of the Ascension,
Lafayette Square, of Baltimore, Md.

JANUARY 16, 1873.

BY

THE REV. A. M. RANDOLPH,

Rector of Emmanuel Church, of Baltimore.

Published at the request of the Vestry of the Church of the Ascension.

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THE FAITH AND THE SERVICE OF A CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

“ And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

St. Mark, x : 44, 45.

EVERY man, my friends, if in any degree he is true to the relations and duties of life, is in many ways a servant of others. God has made human life upon this plan. Fathers and mothers are servants to their children. There is no burden or sense of bondage in that service, for the love which God gives to the relation takes that all away, just as love is that spontaneous and free spirit which fulfils all law and lifts the burden away from all duty, and makes us unconscious of self-denial in our ministrations to others. To be a member of a family involves in some degree a going out of self

and a bending of one's own will and inclinations to the service of the other members ; if then we find this law of ministration imprinted upon the relations of the individual to the family, we may expect also to find it running through the whole structure of society, for home is the foundation which God has laid for the constitution of society. Thus branching out from the home, as its centre, we find this law of ministration in all human relations and in all departments of life. The civil magistrate, whatever his office may be, is a servant of the public, and oftentimes a thankless, unappreciated service it is. A minister is the servant of his congregation ; at least this is St. Paul's conception of the Christian ministry ; indeed the word minister means servant. " We preach, not ourselves, says the apostle, but Christ Jesus the Lord : and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." No prominence of position on the one side or obscurity of lot on the other, can exempt a man from the operation of this general law ; he may be rich but he is never inde-

pendent of human ministrations ; he may be utterly selfish in heart, but this law of mutual help makes his own interests identical with the interests of others, and a purely selfish calculation convinces him that the good of the public is his own individual good.

It follows from this general principle, that the true dignity of position among men consists not in the power over others which office confers, but in the service to others which the functions of office demand. It is not the number we may have to serve us which is the measure of position among men, but it is the number which our opportunities and abilities enable us to reach and to serve by our ministrations.

The man who is of no use in his home or to his neighbors, is in the lowest order in the scale of civilized society. On the other hand, the true dignity of talent and of culture, of integrity and of office, is the service that they may bring to others — the fields of usefulness which are open to them in their day and generation.

The Governor of this State is the servant of all its people, and I suppose few of you have any idea of the pressure of care and the variety of interests with which that office, the highest in your gift, is charged. A Bishop is the servant of his diocese. An Emperor is the servant of all the subjects of his Empire, and as we rise higher in the scale of dignity, we come to one who is above all earthly rule and kingly power, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the servant of all men in all time, in that He came to bear the burden and to die for the sins of the whole world. Now when Christians are called upon to serve one another, and to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, they are not summoned to any duty which in its principle is contrary to the law of their natural life. It is a great mistake to suppose that the law of ministration and self-sacrifice is a new commandment of the Gospel. It is an old commandment, and the Saviour came to revive its authority, and to quicken its spirit, in the life of the race which

was fast going to decay, because that command of God had been forgotten and trampled under foot. It is a natural order from which man in his sins had fallen away, and thus wrought ruin and misery in his life, and the regenerating power of the Gospel is to bring him back under its constraining force, and move his life again in the old orbit of duty and of love to his brother man. Therefore, when we come to be Christians we do but enter into a service which is the highest expression of this natural law, which fits into all of these natural relations, and which imparts to us the spirit and gives us the motive to be true and faithful in them all. Not only so, but the Christian faith opens to us a wider field of service than any we could ever have known by nature. It shows us what ministrations we may render, and what service we owe to one another's souls. It points us to a Divine Person who has done for us an infinite service; who has bought us and ransomed us out of sin and out of death, with the price of His own pre-

cious blood. A follower of the Lord Jesus is the servant of his generation in the highest sense, because he is the servant of Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many souls.

We come, then, to a question which contains the substance of the text — why does a Christian believer work in the service of Christ? Where is the spring of the missionary impulse in the heart of an individual believer, or in the heart of a Christian Church? and in order to get at the truth we must clear away an error.

Are our works in the service of Christ, a part of the price of our redemption, so that they must be added to Christ's work in our behalf before we can be justified in the sight of God? Does a Christian serve his Lord and Saviour in order that he may work out his salvation in and by that service? No doubt this is the motive at the bottom of the religious life of thousands who are named by the name of Christ; but is there a question

that such a motive is wrong and false at its very foundation, and can never bring peace to a sinner's soul? If a man labors for a lifetime to procure salvation, he labors simply in vain; his work all returns upon himself and ends in a sense of emptiness, and at last in weariness and in despair. He must work, not that he may be saved, but because he is already saved. He must give himself to Christ because he has already been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. He must work, not to earn salvation as his wages, but in the faith that salvation has been wrought out for him, and that he is not his own, but that he is bought with a price. You see, then, what a deep and broad difference there is between these two principles of action, and yet the difficulty in discerning this difference is as old as the time of the Apostles. It is precisely the difficulty of the distinction between faith and works. Which of these two comes first in the experience and the life of a believer, and what is the relation between them, and the bearing of each one

upon the great question of a sinner's salvation? which one springs out of and furnishes the motive power and life to the other? The apostle James wrote his Epistle to clear away all misconceptions and confusion from this great Gospel truth; throughout he is seeking to impress upon us that faith is the foundation principle; and not only that works are of no avail, but there is no life in them without faith. His argument and his exhortation revolve around these two points, that it is simply absurd to think of works as living apart from faith, as it would be to conceive of a material body as capable of activity after the vital principle had departed from it; and again he held faith without works to be an impossible conception, for, as the spirit revealed it to him, works were but the signs and expressions of life in the faith.

St James' practical doctrine was, that a man must work *from* his faith. In that is to be found the hope and the soul of all his activity, either in the work of his own salvation,

or in the salvation of others. He must work not to be reconciled to God, but from a sense of a reconciliation already accomplished for him. He must work because the good news of his own salvation has come to him, and the conception has dawned upon him of his position, as a pardoned and a redeemed sinner. Faith, then, in the work of a Saviour for us, faith in that one glorious revelation of the Gospel, that the Saviour by His incarnation, His human life, His death upon the cross, has made provision for the pardon of our sins, and has atoned us to God; this faith is to be the spring of all Christian service. Not only so, but it is that faith and that alone, dear friends, which is to keep you warm and unwearied in any field of Christian duty, this simple view of your salvation as an edifice that has been built, and as a gift that is already yours. You must strive to see and to feel that. You must ask for God's spirit to reveal it to you, and because it is so, because you have been loved with an everlasting love, because this great and infinite service has

been done for you, which you could not do for yourselves, because you have been bought with a price which no estimate of your reason or your imagination can begin to measure—therefore, you are to give your heart to God, you are to give yourself to your Saviour; as your mind and heart widen and deepen to take in the simplicity of this glorious Gospel, you will enter more and more into the spirit and the life of your Lord and Master. No motive but this, no faith but this will stand the attrition of time, and the wear and tear and weariness of this world. You will get tired of striving for yourself or for others in the work of salvation, if you rest your faith anywhere else than upon this foundation principle. A Christian minister and a member of a church must ever be growing in this simple faith—and in that growth is to be found the spirit of perseverance and of enthusiasm in all service and sacrifice for the cause of Christ on to the end of life. The work of a Church may in its machinery seem to go on without

this faith. A minister of the Gospel, and I take him only as an example of a Christian worker—a minister, I say, may move in his office in the service of Christ upon the plane of ambition, or from an intellectual enthusiasm in the mere handling of the truth, or from some subtle spirit, which if he will analyze, he will find to be selfishness at the bottom. But ambition will grow weary of its disappointments, for they are many; and intellectual enthusiasm must wane if there be underneath it no heart convictions of the truths of the blessed Gospel to bear it up above the questionings of doubt, and the bafflings of mystery; and selfishness will ever be tending to economize the outlay of strength in the Master's service, or to direct that strength into channels which flow upon the level of this world. And thus the soul will depart from our ministrations in the service of Christ, leaving all its agencies like the beds of streams that have gone dry, like forms that sound more and more hollow with each repetition.

The church, then, in its very spirit and life is but an expression of faith in that which Christ has done for the soul.

We come now to a true conception of a church. It is a working body—working from the impulse of its faith, working under the leadership of the Son of God. It is not, then, as the notion of some is, a fortified camp, to be defended against the world, but it is an army in the field, moving out to win new territory for its Empire. It is not defensive, but from its very nature it is aggressive. It is not a fold which has for its care the sheep that are already within its enclosures, but it is an extension through time of its Lord's mission and life, in His coming to seek and to save that which is lost. A Church, my friends, is not a company of people gathered together at stated times to be preached to, and to have the sacraments administered to them, and thus to be educated in the knowledge and the saving grace of the Gospel; but as these agencies, by the spirit of God, are working salvation into them, they are to

work it outwards, in its relations and aspects and ministrations to the world around them.

Let us look for a moment at the constitution of a local church. It has its manifold agencies of ministration in the Gospel. The chief of these, and because the chief, the servant of them all, is the minister of the word, he who stands in the relation to souls as an ambassador for Christ, and whose high office it is to interpret and to hold forth the word of life. I say nothing now of that other function of a Christian minister: I mean the ministration in the sacraments of the Gospel. There is enough said and written about that in these days; indeed there is a bewildering mass of literature upon these subjects which is spread before the minds of our people in every variety of form. Much of it is very feeble, and has not strength enough to live long. More of it, again, is characterized by the spirit of controversy, and has too much of the human element in it to be of service to the cause of Gospel truth. The strongest, perhaps, is that which

seeks to clear away error, so that men may see the simplicity of the truth. It is enough for me to say to you that your minister's office in the ministration of the blessed sacraments of the Christian Church is full of tenderness and solemn dignity. Let us turn, then, for a moment, to his office as a teacher and a preacher of the word, and a pastor of the flock committed to his charge.

And first, it is well for a minister and well for his people to understand the relation which his ministry bears to other forms of ministration in which the Spirit of God works and finds an entrance into the spirit of man.

The ministration of the Word, thanks be to God, has other agencies than our lips — the Spirit of God in its work of breaking man's opposition to the Gospel, man's unwillingness to be saved, has other channels to the conscience than the voice of the living messenger. It is well and it is hopeful for both preacher and hearer to remember this.

As we look into the faces of those who are gathered Sunday after Sunday under our ministrations, the precious souls committed to our charge, it is a great help to realize this thought: "I am not the only agency through which Christ Jesus is coming with the ministration of His word, to these dear people. My voice is only for a moment and its sound dies and passes away. These hearers will go out again to-morrow into the currents of the world, the excitements of its pleasures, the pressure of its business, and very soon, in the roar of that stream, my words are lost and forgotten, and if God be not preaching to them in some other way than by me, then my work is almost hopeless, and their chances for receiving permanent impressions are very narrow indeed." God's ministrations of the Word and His messengers of grace are as constant as the daily experiences and work of life. His light is not confined to one channel, but it is poured into and through all the crevices and byways and highways of a man's life. The system

of ministration to the souls of men, culminates, I suppose, in the pulpit, and in the worship of the church, and in the influences of Sunday. These are designed to gather up and teach by authority, the lessons which come to us through all the other means of spiritual education. But we are to remember that the Providence of God, is ever at work with its preparations of the heart of man, for the seed sowing of the Word of Life.

Here, for example, is a man, here are a number of men and women in every Christian congregation in whose minds the ministration of the Gospel have as yet stirred no deep convictions of the truth. The earnestness of the pulpit has as yet found no answering earnestness in them. They have heard the logic and the love of the Gospel proclaimed by lips more eloquent, perchance, than yours, but the truth seems to play only on the surface of their natures. They are like the ground in these winter months. If the farmer should sow his seed to-morrow upon the hard, unbroken soil, is there room for

disappointment if it all comes to nothing? but by-and-by the soft breathings of spring are thawing the chill and breaking up the frozen fountains, and opening the bosom of the earth, and the ploughman and the seed-sower are busy in the fields. Now God's preparations of heart to receive the word of life are just as needful, and just as real in the realm of spiritual things, as his preparations in the fields of nature for the seed-sower and the harvest.

The minister, when he enters his pulpit on Sunday, should remember that there are hearts there before him like the ground in the days of spring, they are soft, they are broken up, they are ready for the seed of the Word. This man of cool and critical intellect, or self-poised in his morality, or self-sufficient in the things of this world, his time is not yet. But if God spares him, it may be for a day when the stiffness is twisted out of him by some sharp trial, and his mind is turned around and directed upon the truth as it never has been before, you

may see the change from pride to humility, from self-sufficiency to a simple faith, which could have been wrought in the man in no other way. How God can crush a man's conceit, and reveal to him all his foolishness, and weakness and poverty, by a few days of sickness, or by an unexpected bolt of calamity which shatters his fortune, or by some other one of the thousand forms of providential discipline. A minister must remember this, and the hearer must remember it too. You are being preached to, day by day, by other channels than your minister's voice. That may be weak, and what he says may be above or below the standards of your literary taste, or it may not meet your wants; but God's ministrations of the word of his grace in trials and in blessings, in discipline and in privileges, these are as unceasing as the order of nature.

And then, again, the minister of the Gospel has behind him, and as it were a support to him, in the ministration of the Word, what we may call the spirit and religious stand-

ards of his time. He must study this. He must learn to interpret it, and to take advantage of whatever of good and of hopefulness there is in it.

We are all, my friends, prone to take dark views of our own time. Its evils are near to us, they are right here under our eyes, whilst the evils of the ages behind us are far away in the past. Now it is a quality of evil to die out of memory, it has in it the elements of disintegration, it is the quality of good to live, it has in it the element of vitality. When we look, therefore, at the past we see only the sunlit summits upon its landscape, whilst the valleys and the shadows are below the line of our vision. So we speak of the good old time because we see *only the good* in the old time. The church of to-day finds a temptation in this illusion, to look behind and to bend the knee, and bow the head in reverence towards the past, as if Christ were there instead of here with us to-day in His word, in His spirit, and in His power. Men see

some element of good in the forms and ecclesiastical systems of a mediaeval time, while the counterbalancing evils and corruptions growing out of them have dropped out of view. There is, then, delusion in the glory of the past, when it charms our minds into forgetfulness of its humiliations and sorrows, its corruptions and its falsehoods.

We believe that this age is more reverent towards religious truth than any other age the world has ever known. We believe that men are asking more earnestly now than they ever did before, for that which the simple Gospel of the Son of God alone can give them. We complain sometimes of the irreverence of scientific skepticism; but is there anything in the time of infidelity to-day to be compared to the bitterness of Voltaire, to the subtle sneers of Gibbon and of Hume, and to the ribaldry of Thomas Paine? No, my friends, men are more earnest, and the convictions of this age concerning the truths of Christianity, are, I am persuaded, deeper and firmer and broader

than ever before. What a vantage ground this is for us to stand upon? How should we bless God for the brighter signs of our day? There are many shadows, and they are long and deep; but all that I say is, that the light is growing and the shadows are being lifted. It must be so if the millennial dawn is on its way to us.

Now the minister of the Gospel stands at the head of all these ministrations of the Word, as their interpreter and their exponent. His office embraces and touches them all. He is a teacher of the Bible. He is an interpreter of God's Providence in its ministrations to the souls of man. He is a guide to the public, religious standards and spirit of his time. And above all, as the result and the end to which these other functions of ministration are subordinate and tributary, he is a preacher of salvation to the sinner through the one and only Saviour of sinners.

Looking thus, beloved friends, at the field of duty which is before a minister of the church of Christ, do you suppose that any

man in his senses would ever undertake that office, or that he could stand up in it and truly fill its duties in his own strength, or rather in his own human weakness? Why how is it in the personal experience of a Christian man, in the daily walk and duty of life? Will you go out to the round of your work, or to the scenes of your temptations for a single day without a prayer to God, to brace your principles, to clear your conscience, and to give you that which is not in you by nature, a single eye and a steady purpose to do His will—will you venture into the world without that? If so, you have yet to learn and to put in practice the first elements of religion.

A growing consciousness of the nearness of God is characteristic of a life of faith. It is not always so. There are some faithful souls to whom He is very near, and yet it is not vouchsafed to them to feel His presence. They grope in the dark and cry out for God as if he were afar off when all the time He is close up beside them. God is nearer to

you when you are weak than when you are strong. He draws near to you on one side, when the devil draws near to you on the other — when you are pressed by duty, or sorely buffeted by temptation, or called to stand up for principle or for right, you may be sure that God is near to you then, and if your spiritual faculties could catch sounds from the spirit world you might hear the chariot wheels of the Almighty rolling up beside you.

Now there are none of you who need more of the Spirit of God within you than the minister who is to be your guide and teacher in spiritual things. His temptations are many and very subtle. His duties are very wearing, and unless he finds renewal and constant refreshment from on high, the grinding processes of this city life will wear the life and the spirit out of him. The gift of the Spirit of God is his one great need. When he is preaching he needs to feel that the Spirit is hovering near to him. When his lips are uttering the prayers of the church he needs to pray for the Spirit's life to quicken

his devotion, to take the cant out of the tones of his voice and the hollowness of official repetition out of his heart. When in the ministrations of his pastorate he meets your doubts, or bears with your unfaithfulness in duty, or your inconsistencies of conduct, when he comes with his sympathy to help you to stand up under your sorrows, or with the hopes of the Gospel, and the cross of the Saviour to hold up before your dying eyes, in all these solemn and tender offices he needs more and more the gifts of the Spirit of God.

It is not in the resources of a cultivated intellect, or in a hopeful and sympathetic heart that constancy and fervor in a Gospel ministry are to be found—but a minister's true power is here—it is in an intellect which is ever coming to a clearer conception of the worth of souls and of the Gospel of salvation—it is in a heart that feels the preciousness of Christ, and in a spirit that is always open and always seeking the indwelling of God's spirit.

Your minister will have his days of discouragement and weariness and disappointment, but if he lives in any degree near to his privileges he will find in his work the truest blessedness and the sweetest joy that a man can ever know in this world. And you will find, as the years pass by, that he will have a stronger hold upon your intellects and a wider place in your hearts, than he can possibly have to-day. You, then, who are to be his fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, and members of the church of which he is this day the appointed and instituted minister, must remember to pray for him—pray for him in your closets in secret—pray for him with your children at your family altars—pray for him as he stands to plead for his Master and to plead with dying men. What blessing and strength would come to this church from this solemn and tender service to-day if it should lead even one of you to the resolution, never to forget to pray, for the outpouring of God's spirit upon your minister.

But I must not detain you longer from that which is the most important feature of this service. There is one thought, however, which I must speak before I sit down.

You and your minister must bear in mind that the sphere of his ministration is amongst you, and in behalf of your spiritual and eternal interests.

The work of a Gospel minister is in all of its higher aspects a *local work*. It is bounded by the limits of his parish. Many forget this, and so they waste a great deal of strength, and power and time, upon ministrations that are beyond their true field of duty. They imagine that the true sphere of their influence is the whole church, and that no portion of the continent should be entirely excluded from a share in their ministrations. It is true that we owe duties and are under responsibilities to the Church of Christ, in our own land and throughout the world; but we are discharging these duties most effectually in proportion, as we are faithful and diligent in the specific field

of work, which God in his Providence has marked out for us. There are few of us who are born to influence the world, or to be remembered by future generations. Your minister's highest sphere of duty is not to write a book in order to enlarge the stock of human knowledge upon religious subjects. It is not to busy himself in the working of church machinery, or in the discussion of minor questions in church congresses, or convocations, or conventions, not to be a bishop and an overseer of many churches, but to be the faithful pastor and shepherd of the one flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer. His strongest earnestness and his best gifts are to be given to this work, which in one sense is local, but very wide and far-reaching in another. Books perish like the leaves of autumn, and only a few stars in the firmament of literature shine on from age to age. Ecclesiastical organisations and church machinery are continually changing to meet new wants, and to adapt themselves to new

relations. Mere human forms for the expression of divine truth, either in creeds or in confessions of faith and systems of theology, are subject to the operation of that law of change which belongs to the imperfections of every thing that is merely human, and from which the infallible word of God alone is exempt. But the man who makes his mark upon souls, is wielding even for this world an influence which is as wide and as lasting as time itself.

May I presume to say one word in closing about the financial affairs of this church. If there be any thing in your condition in that respect which seems to be discouraging, all that I have to say is, do not suffer it to chill your zeal or to burden you with anxiety. When you have done the best which rigid economy and sacrifice and systematic giving can do, then leave the rest with God, and put your care upon the great Head and Bishop of all of our churches. I think the Lord has blessed this city and blessed our own dear communion with

many noble Christian men who will not fail when a sister church in need makes an earnest call for help. There are many true men and women in this church who have been standing by it in dark days, and whose resolution and sacrifice God will most surely reward in blessings for the future. Be true to your church and to your minister. Let the grace of God shine in you and shine out from you. Pray on and work on and God will in his own good time lift the burden, and give you a free course of usefulness and blessing in this beautiful portion of the city which is the field of your labor for Christ.

We come to-day—with the ecclesiastical authority of the diocese, our Bishop at our head—to invoke the presence of the dear Saviour, and the abiding influence of the Spirit of all grace upon your minister and upon you, the flock he is to feed.

